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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

threatened. It was not a little change that was needed; everything was wrong—bad paste, soft glaze, impotent firing. To commence *de novo*, to spend time and money in fresh experiments while his old business was decaying, to keep the ship afloat with a leak forward and aft—this was what he had to do. Of course he did it, or this article would never have been written.

But it was not done in a day, nor without a severe crisis. To use his own words, "J'allai à deux doigts de ma perte." That he was earnest and industrious goes without saying; but for a potter he was not unfortunate, for the clay he wanted he found not far away. Nevertheless, the discovery took time and money, and when it was made he was not at the end of his troubles, for the new earth would not marry with the old glaze. Fresh experiments resulting in fresh discoveries produced the required *email-couverte*; and in 1877 M. Massier was able to produce work satisfactory from a commercial as well as an artistic point of view. In other words, his ware was useful and durable, as well as fine in shape and beautiful in hue. To his colors a very notable addition was made before 1878, after some years of experiment. This was a Peacock-Blue, deep and soft, almost identical with that found on Persian falenae. It was no doubt partly to this discovery that M. Massier owed his great success at the Paris Exhibition of 1878. It produced a small sensation amongst artists. Not only M. Gérôme, who had suggested the effort, but many others, including MM. Bonnat, Cabanel, Cot and Jules Lefebvre, wrote their congratulations. Even amongst his fellow-laborers one at least was found to add his voice to the chorus of praise. This was none other than M. Deck, one of the most famous of modern keramists; not less noted for the success of his researches than the perfection and taste of his manufactures, the discoverer of Sang-de-Bœuf and Underglaze-Gold, he did not fail to greet the appearance of the new color with a generous cheer.

Such artistic and professional appreciation was, however, by no means confined to the potter's coloring, but extended to his shapes and taste and theory of art. The silver medal at Paris in 1878, and diplomas of honor at Marseilles in 1879, and Tours in 1881, were scarcely so much prized as the warm recognition he had already received from his peers. Commercial success has not tended to relax his scientific and artistic efforts. Quite recently they have yielded another color to his choice palette, scarcely inferior in beauty and importance to his Peacock-Blue. This is a red, something between beetroot and crimson, a color at once rich and transparent, admirably suited for large vases for the garden and the hall, to light up dark corners and warm cold spaces. I may add here that M. Massier still continues the manufacture of architectural ornaments in terra-cotta, but the culinary utensils were given up in 1860.

Our illustrations, which are taken from specimens lent by Messrs. Howell and James, show throughout careful attention to beauty of form. The first is of vases covered with a single color, in which not only beauty but simplicity of shape is achieved. In the second the vases have been specially designed for the exhibition of pictures to be painted on the sides. The shapes of the vases, as such, is sacrificed to a certain extent to the decoration, but the compromise is effected with some feeling for grace and real purity of line. In the other three are figured vases of various shapes, Oriental, classical and European, mostly decorated in that modern impasto style which, known by the name of Barbotine, is perhaps the most important contribution which Europe has made to the resources of keramics.

JAPANESE LACQUER.

HOW A FAMOUS JAPANESE TREE IS CULTIVATED.

JAPANESE lacquer has been a familiar name to the entire civilized world for so many years that it is a matter of surprise to discover how little it is understood. Recourse to the ordinary books of reference does not repay the trouble, and only serves to give a greater realization of the prevailing ignorance. Exhibitions have shown the surface of articles from China and Japan of marvellous beauty and finish, and have afforded information in regard to their cost without being able to give the practical knowledge which an intelligent public demand. The little volume entitled 'Oriental,' printed for the use of visitors to the Walters galleries, has been for the last four years the most reliable source, and it stands alone to-day in the matter of exact information. The facilities afforded for a careful study of the artistic individuality in the choice collections of lacquer, to which the public have access in those galleries, bring enhanced interest to such facts as can be gleaned.

The rubs vernicefera, an evergreen tea, from which the lac or gum is obtained, is cultivated in every section of Japan. As long ago as the sixth century, an edict of the Emperor required every landowner to plant a certain proportion of his acreage with this lacquer tree, just as he was compelled to cultivate and maintain a certain number of mulberry trees, and but for this governmental support it is doubtful if the art, even then widely practised, would have attained its great perfection. Every tree, when tapped to obtain its gum, died in the course of two years. The amount obtained from a tree five years old seldom exceeded three ounces. In the mountainous districts the tree was of slower growth, and was permitted to grow for ten years before the gum was drained. The gum varied in quality according to the part of the tree which exuded it, that from the twigs being most esteemed and drying with superior hardness.

Among other uses in very remote periods lacquer served in finishing coffins, probably for ornamentation as much as because it rendered the wood impervious to moisture, but its everyday uses were those which gradually raised it more and more to a place among the arts. The gum, when applied to the prepared wood, can be prepared with either oil or water. Modern lacquers contain scarcely a trace of the true gum, and hence it comes that they do not possess either the enduring qualities or beauty of older work. True lac will not blister or peel from the wood, and does not change appearance from subjection to water or heat. The most conclusive test of this property was in 1873, when the steamer *Nile*, returning to Japan, with the specimens purchased for the Yeddo museum, foundered in twenty-five fathoms of water. Eighteen months after divers employed by the government recovered two hundred cases from the steamer, and the ancient lacquers were as perfect in joints, color and polish as when they left the hands of their makers.

It is worthy of note that although the woods most valued as a basis of lacquer work are not of kinds which have ever been esteemed valuable for their durability, yet, when imprisoned in the coatings of this gum, they have remained as sound for centuries as when first fashioned. And this is true of many specimens seven hundred years old, examples of which may be seen in the cases of the Walters galleries.



DESIGN FOR PANEL.